



**Price of a barrel
of petroleum
today:**

US\$ 46.34

INSIDE TODAY

WORLD NEWS

POWER SURGE



US soldiers flock around a damaged Armored Personnel Carrier, left, on the ground of a suicide bombing near the Parwan governor's compound in Parwan, north of Kabul, Afghanistan on Sunday, Dec. 29, 2008.

See **INTERNATIONAL NEWS**

SPORTS NEWS

TRIPLE CROWN



Indianapolis Colts quarterback Peyton Manning smiles is interviewed following the Colts' 31-24 win over the Jacksonville Jaguars in an NFL football game, Thursday, Dec. 18, 2008, in Jacksonville, Fla. .

See **Sports Today**

Islanders welcome in the New Year on the beach



PALM BEACH – The crew of Jolly Pirates wishes all the readers of the Aruba Today Happy Holidays, and a fantastic 2009.

A Happy New Year at Texas De Brazil



PALM BEACH - Texas de Brazil Churrascaria has been the venue of choice for many parties to celebrate an anniversary, office party, incentive or any other reason to come and enjoy the finest meats and salads served by the army of carvers and waiters.

Read Next Page

Premium Chicken Line
Crispy or Grilled



© 2008 McDonald's Corporation



RENAISSANCE
MALL

Shopping night

Till 8 o'clock at night. December 22, 27 & 30 and January 2 & 3

A Happy New Year at Texas De Brazil



PALM BEACH - Texas de Brazil Churrascaria has been the venue of choice for many parties to celebrate an anniversary, office party, incentive or any other reason to come and enjoy the finest meats and salads served by the



army of carvers and waiters. The devoted staff and management would like to thank you for all the great times and memorable moments by wishing you all the best for 2009! □

- Photos by JJ -



Celebrating 25 years as Aruba's place to play!

Super Bingo Saturday!

Super 4-Card Bingo starting at 1pm!

\$6 for 4-Card Bingo! • 8 games to play! • \$1,000 in CASH PRIZES!

Additional \$500 CASH PRIZE in our Early Bird Drawing when you purchase your card prior to 12 noon!

TOMORROW Don't miss 20/20 Sunday!
\$20 CASH giveaways every 20 minutes.

Table games open at 6pm with \$3.00 Blackjack daily!

Open daily 10am to 4am • J.E. Irausquin Blvd #47 • 583.5000 • www.ahambracasino.com

Must be an Alhambra Advantage member. All programs and promotions are subject to change or cancellation without notice.



Mcleo's
Sports Bar & Grill

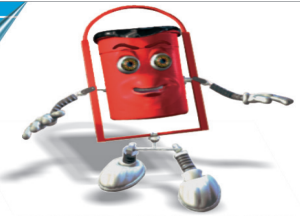
Open daily 6pm to 2am
with Happy Hour from 6 to 8pm



Alhambra
CASINO
ARUBA
A DIVI RESORTS PROPERTY

Aruba TODAY

KEEP ARUBA CLEAN...



THANKS FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION

SALE

Salvatore Ferragamo

ARUBA BOUTIQUE
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WWW.FERRAGAMO.COM

The players out in full force

Poker At The Excelsior a big hit



PALM BEACH—Recently the Excelsior Casino hosted its famous Single Table Tournament where fabulous prizes were on offer. One of the prizes was a cruise trip. Action was fierce, the players were determined, in short another great tourney at Excelsior Casino.

The Excelsior Casino is located in the Holiday Inn Resort, a 600 room facility. The Casino has been in existence for 30 years; 50% of our guests come from the United States, 30% from South America and the balance from Europe. The beautiful Excelsior Casino will satisfy your taste for games of chance. One of Aruba's finest casinos, the Excelsior Casino features Las Vegas

style gambling of all games of chance as well as a beautiful sports betting area and poker room. The Excelsior Casino is the only casino in Aruba to offer 3-4-5 times odds on Craps and Double Deck Blackjack. Spanish 21 and Blackjack can be dealt out of a shoe at your request.

And, most of all, the Excelsior Casino does not hit the soft 17. The Excelsior Casino features the largest Poker Room with limits as low as \$2-\$4 to \$50-\$100 no limit. No need to carry coins to the cashier! The Excelsior Casino's state of the art slot machines are totally Ticket-In, Ticket-Out.



WATERFRONT CRABHOUSE

Saturday Special

SATURDAY'S LOBSTER NIGHT

New England Clam Chowder OR Tossed Salad with choice of dressing

Steamed Maine Lobster with drawn butter and lemon OR Broiled Maine Lobster stuffed with crab meat

\$ 34.95 + 15% S.C. + 3% Gov. Tax

Served with rice or baked potato, sour cream, Caribbean polenta and garden vegetables, freshly baked corn bread, soft dinner rolls and Dutch butter.

WATERFRONT CRABHOUSE, Renaissance Marketplace

For reservations call: **583-5858 OR 582-0184**

This offer not valid with any other offer or coupon



"FAVI FUNDACION CU VISION"

TOURIST GO FLEAMARKET



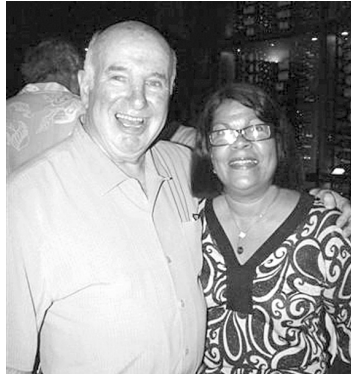
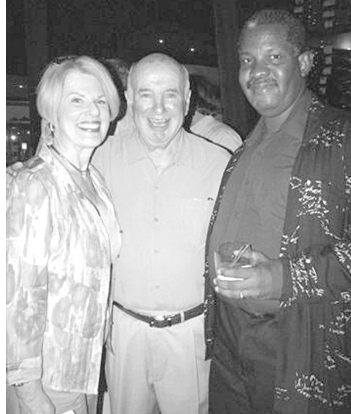
L.G. Smith Blvd. Apposite Container Harbor - Orange Flags
OPEN SATURDAY & SUNDAY FROM 8AM TO 5PM
ARUBAN ART-CRAFTS-SOUVENIRS-T-SHIRT OVER 100.000 ARTICLES
 Taxis - Bus Tours - Easy constant Public Bus transportation, stay a few hours -
 tell, bring your friends. Be smart Do what Locals do.
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Ed & Maureen Lewi are Ambassadors of Goodwill



Eagle Beach – Ed & Maureen Lewi were named Ambassadors of Goodwill on Ed's birthday, December 29, 2008. The honor was personally bestowed by Aruba's Minister of Tourism & Transportation Ing. Edison Briesen which made the



ceremony, at Divi's Windows on Aruba very special. Ed and Maureen, from upstate New York, Saratoga Springs, were involved with the promotion of Aruba for many years. Ed, founder of



Ed Lewi Associates in Clifton Park NY served as member of the board of directors for Divi Resorts and consulted on A&P projects at Alhambra Casino introducing the island to American holiday celebrations, and fireworks among many other exciting and innovative marketing and promotional strategies. Under his dedicated guidance Aruba's tourist product grew and prospered in the 70s through the early 90s, nurturing a great relationship with the community and with the Divi Resorts family.

Continued on Next Page



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 Schotland str. 70

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Quality Apartments



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 *Kitchen / Airco / Cable TV *Swimming Pool
 Less than 1 mile from Eagle Beach & 4 large supermarkets.
 Feel free to contact or visit us.
 Mon - Fri: 8am-7pm. Sat & Sun: 9am-5pm.

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 Food & Liquor Store

NIGHT SHOPPING UNTIL 10:30PM

Cold Beer prices ranges from \$2.
 Souvenirs a wide variety of snacks.
 Also available Rums made in Aruba at a good price.
 T-Shirt at \$4. / Aruba bags \$8.

COLD WINE VARIETY

Bring this Ad & receive a FREE gift with any purchases of \$25.

OPEN Monday-Friday 8:30am - 10:30pm
DAILY Saturday 9:00am - 10:30pm
 Sunday 9:00am - 9:00pm

We're located at walking distance from the High Rise Area.
 You can get your basic food & drink.

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 Tel: 586-1710 • email: shopngo@setarnet.aw

MORE4LESS
 Jeep & Car Rental

www.more4less-aruba.com



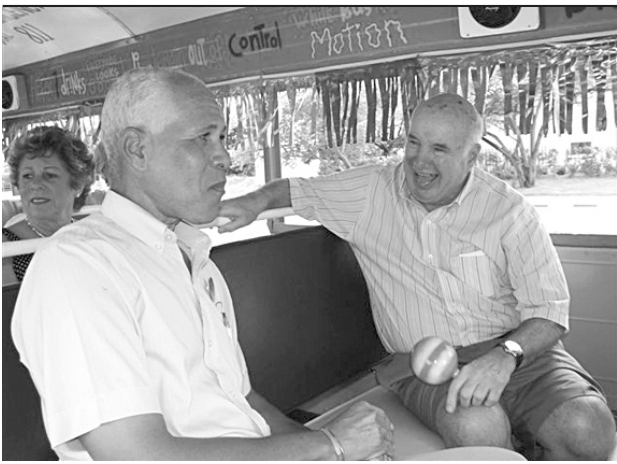
We Rent
 Harley Davidson

Jeep Wrangler 1 Day US\$ 85,00 3 Days US\$ 189,00
 start from 1Week US\$ 346,00

Cars start from 3 Day US\$ 99,00 1 Week US\$ 180,00

ALL PRICES INCLUDE 3rd PART INSURANCE, FREE PICK-UP & DROP OFF - FREE MAP & MILAGE

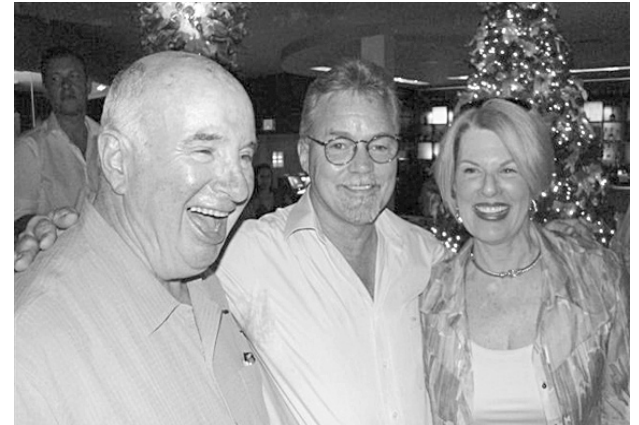
For Reservation: 588-7255 / 593-2864 / 593-3849



Ed and Maureen later moved to Naples Florida where they spend their summers yet Aruba and its people still hold a very dear place in their hearts. Last week on Ed's birthday, the couple and a number of their friends stopped over, while on a Caribbean cruise. They enjoyed an island tour on board the Kukoo Kunuku, lunch at the Faro Blanco restaurant and mostly a cherished a reunion with their Divi



friends. In the early evening, just before heading back to the ship they hosted an elegant cocktail party at Windows on Aruba where they were surprised with the Goodwill Ambassador certificate delivered by the island's Minister of Tourism & Transportations. Pictured here Ed's magical day on Aruba reconnecting with former colleagues and receiving the ultimate honor for being an excellent friend of the island. □



NEW!! WESTPUNT LAND



Excellent location!!

For sale land located in excellent location on paved road near golf course and beaches. Total of 600 m2 land. 2 story building is allowed. **US \$ 99.000,-**

ESMERALDA LAND



Great piece of land in excellent location in Esmeralda! Near beaches, golf course and hotels. Total of 714 m2. **US \$ 110.000,-**

NEW!! CALABAS/NOORD



Newly built cunucu style home located in Calabas Plaza residency with pool and club house. 2 bedr., 2 bathr., 339 m2 / 126 m2. **US \$ 145.000,-**

SEROE PELA/NOORD



Nice cozy home with apartment!

Nice house with apartment in good location/3 bedr./2 bathr./apartment with own bathr. and entrance/691 m2 / 225 m2/ Bar with BBQ. Nice garden. **US \$ 366.000,-**

SAVANETA



Villa with private deck on ocean!!

Spacious villa with large private deck on the ocean on the beach of Savaneta, 3 bedr., 2 bathr., carport. 512 m2/ 463 m2. **US \$ 469.000,-**

RUBY WITH POOL



Brand new spacious home with pool

Newly built home near beaches and hotels. 3 bedr./3 bathr./maids quarter/pool/730 m2/228 m2/ Completely fenced. **US \$ 495.000,-**

RUBY WITH POOL



Gorgeous villa with pool in excellent location! 4 bedr. (incl. studio apartment) with 4 bathr., laundry, storage, garden, laundry, carport. **US \$ 590.000,-**

ROOI SANTO WITH POOL



The home that has it all...

Gorgeous fully furnished villa/ 3 bedr., 3 bathr./pool/jacuzzi/gym/putting green/maid's quarter/outdoor kitchen. Excellent finishing/789m2/250m2 **Call for more info**



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Discover the Radisson Aruba



Saturday: Simply Perfect - Prime Rib

\$19.95 per person plus service charge

Featuring Prime Rib carved to your liking, Southern Fried Chicken, Gourmet Salad Bar, Garlic mashed Potatoes, Baked Potatoes, Vegetable of the Day, selection of Desserts.

Dinner Buffet: 5:00 to 10:00 p.m.



All You Can Eat Dinner Buffet

LagunaRestaurantAruba.com

*Kids under age 12, one per paying adult.

• KIDS EAT FREE •

Not valid with any other offers.



SunsetGrilleAruba.com

Nightly Special: Fine Dining

USDA Prime Beef, Fresh Seafood and Spa Cuisine
Voted "2007 Best Restaurant in the Caribbean"
AAA 4-Diamond & Wine Spectator Award Winner

Choose from indoor art deco ambiance or open-air terrace dining.

Reservations Recommended



The Larimar Spa at the Radisson Aruba features nine beautifully appointed treatment rooms, offering a full menu of services including advanced skin care therapies, therapeutic and integrated massages, exfoliating, nourishing and detoxifying body treatments including body polishes and wraps, and a full-service salon...all certain to ensure your return to indulge time after time.

- Massages
- Body Treatments
- Facials/Skincare
- Salon Services
- Gift Certificates

Open Daily 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.
For appointments, call 526.6053

LarimarSpaAruba.com



MiraSoloAruba.com

Martini Bar

Our outdoor lounge perched atop cascading waterfalls and open to sun, stars and cooling breezes. Liquid pleasures await...premium vodkas, scotches, cognacs, and tequilas - or choose from our Martini Madness menu. The place to start, end or spend the evening!

Open weekdays from 4 p.m. and weekends from 3 p.m.
Live music with "El Prove"



GilligansAruba.com

Casual Beachside Dining

Breakfast: 7:00 to 11:00 a.m.
Lunch: 12:00 noon to 5:00 p.m. • Dinner: 6:00 to 10:00 p.m.

Sunset Salute Happy Hour with Live Entertainment

Daily 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.
Bar: 11:00 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.

At Aqua Grill Restaurant

New Yorkers know where to get the best seafood in Aruba

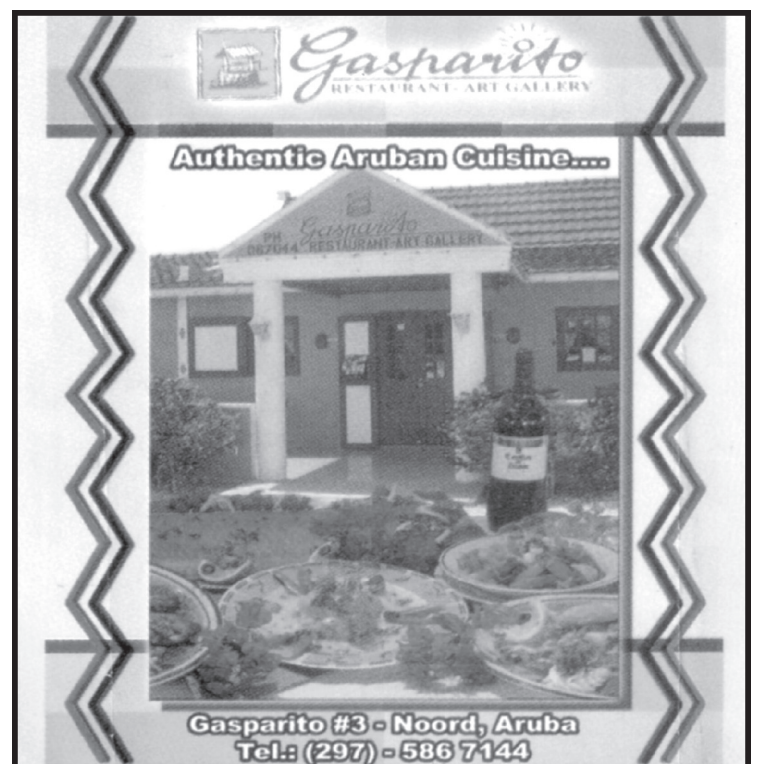


PALM BEACH – Want to know where to dine in Aruba? Just ask any of the island's repeat guests. New Yorkers Stephanie and Joel Gluck have been to Aruba 18 times, and they can often be found dining at the island's critically-acclaimed Aqua Grill.

In fact, the couple chose Aqua Grill to not only ring in the New Year, but to also celebrate their 41st anniversary. Daughter Robin and her boyfriend, Lloyd, flew in from San Francisco to share in the celebrations.

Aqua Grill enjoys a loyal following from both tourists and locals who come to enjoy the island's largest raw bar, live Maine lobster, and fresh fish flown in daily and caught just off the island's shores.

To make Aqua Grill a part of your vacation dining itinerary, call 586-5900 for reservations ☐



Gasparito #3 - Noord, Aruba
Tel.: (297) - 586 7144



Don't drink & DRIVE

J.E. Irausquin Boulevard 81 | Palm Beach | Radisson.com/Aruba | 526.6612 or 526.6613



MARRIOTT OPENS THE NEW YEAR WITH A BIG BANG



PALM BEACH - On Wednesday, December 31st, 2008 at exactly 1.30 p.m. the Aruba Marriott celebrated the year end of 2008 with a 4 million pagara. General Manager Rick Zeolla lit the Aruba Marriott pagara which started in front of Marriott's Aruba Surf Club and ended at the

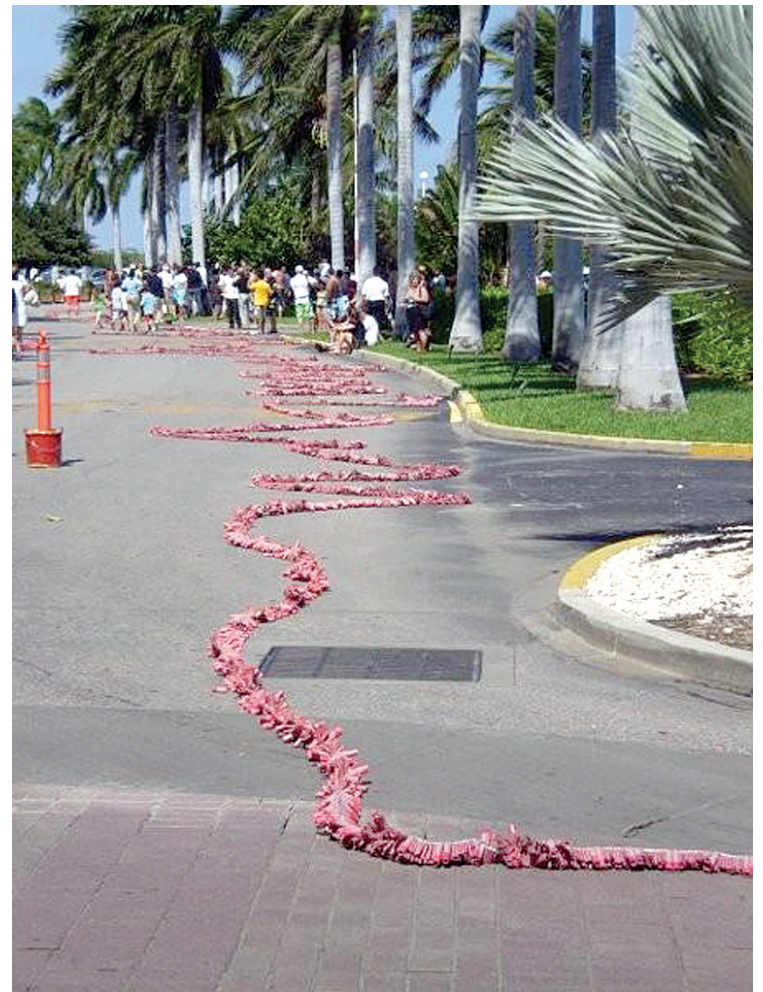
Aruba Marriott Resort's main entrance. Besides the enthusiasm of the Marriott associates, this special event attracted many of the hotel guests staying at all three Marriott properties. The hotels' "Dande" group, which consisted of a group of Marriott's associates, went around the three

properties to spread the good wishes for the New Year.

At night, the Aruba Marriott Resort threw a special New Years Eve Beach party for its guests.

This was the first time, the Aruba Marriott Resort celebrated New Years Eve out on the beach. Over 800 guests joined to open 2009 on the white sandy beach in front of the newly renovated La Vista restaurant. Guests were treated to the entertaining tunes by the live band "Sound in Motion".

The outcome of the event was tremendous and a joyous occasion for Marriott's guests. The Aruba Marriott wishes all a "Bon Anja" for 2009! □



Experience authentic regional ambiance every Friday evening at Pam-Pam Café

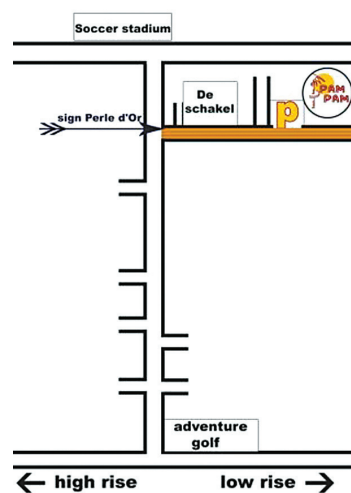


Pam-Pam Café, located in the charming Perle D'Or Resort in Bubali, is the place to be on Friday evenings for a great taste of regional music, dance, food and hospitality, as proprietors and hosts Nico and Monique van de Borne welcome guests for their weekly "Latin Night."

Pam-Pam Café is situated in a delightful tropical setting that is the perfect backdrop for a show by 2002 World Salsa Champions Janice and Oslin Boekhoudt, who run their Pachanga Dance School

out Perle D'Or. They and their dance troupe put on a show of the exotic Zouk, originating from the French islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique, and inspiration for the Brazilian Lambada. If their sensual movements inspire any audience members, they can sign up at Pam-Pam for private dance lessons from the Pachanga crew, which also teach Salsa and Merengue.

In addition to the island music and dance, reasonably prices snacks (10.50 in Aruban florins (\$6) for an Assorted Snack Platter or Buffalo Wings among



other choices) and cocktails are available throughout the evening. From 11 PM until closing time, Pam-Pam offers a special on top shelf whiskey for only 6 Aruban



florins (\$3.50)

If you are looking for the "real deal" in Caribbean entertainment and ambiance and a chance to rub elbows with islanders, schedule Pam-Pam Café as your Friday night entertainment!

Pam Pam restaurant

First-time patrons will be pleasantly surprised by an appealing a la carte menu that is quite affordably priced, and main courses, (25) which are priced between \$10 / \$22, include salad, and a hearty serving of side orders.

Pam-Pam's house specialty is a unique method of

preparation, which presently, in Aruba, is found only at their establishment and which they have dubbed their "Gourmet Meal." A grill and a collection of the freshest of ingredients for the various dishes ordered are assembled tableside, and patrons prepare the food themselves, controlling their preference of seasonings and garnishes, along with degree of doneness, providing a unique and personal taste treat. It is suggested that reservations for this singular dining experience be made one day in advance.

When you want to see restaurants menu, visit: www.visitaruba.com Phone: 5877710 or 5932660 □

Only the highest quality will do Nobushi makes sushi like no one else



PASEO HERENCIA - Nobushi brings to Aruba the finest sushi. If you are in a hurry, go somewhere else. At Nobushi, every single piece gets the love and attention it needs from the professional Sushi chefs. The chefs specialize in Aruba Exotic Sushi and Asian Cuisine with unique flavors second to none. The ever so friendly staff will gladly explain the different dishes and specials to you, and help you with unique food & wine pairings. Nobushi Sushi Bar & Asian Cuisine

features a variety sashimi, sushi rolls, chicken, fish and meat entrees that will enlighten your senses. Nobushi is located in the Paseo Herencia Mall across the Holiday Inn Resort.

For reservations & more information please call: 586-2211 or ask your concierge.



Get ready for a close and personal encounter with huge, prehistoric birds! The Aruba Ostrich Farm invites you to meet these unique birds and learn more about their behavior, natural instinct and may-be even stand on its enormous eggs. Our Savanna Lodge Restaurant serves ostrich delicacies, chicken dishes, salads, vegetarian dishes and offers a



breathtaking view along Aruba's north shore. Don't forget to pay a visit to our African Art Shop!



Bring this ad for a 20% discount on the tour. Not valid with other promotions.

JOLLY Pirates

SAIL, SNORKEL, SWIM & SWING!
DAILY 9:30-2pm \$55pp
Visit 3 Great sites with BBQ, Open Bar, Gear & Ropeswing!

AFTERNOON SNORKEL
DAILY 3-6pm only \$33pp
Shorter version of am cruise
Open Bar, Gear & Ropeswing!

SUNSET SAIL
Mon & Fri 5-7pm only \$27pp
Open Bar included

Call 586 8107 or 592 7858

\$10 off

Valid only with direct tel. reservation - cannot be combined with other offers. Save \$10 per coupon/per couple for morning cruises. Save \$5 per coupon/per couple for afternoon cruises.

Casa Tua makes the best pizzas; period.

a recipe perfected over thirty years

Casa Tua draws a crowd of local and not-so-local folks who can't seem to get enough of the pizza and the place. There's almost always a wait here, even if you have reservations, so place yourself at the bar with the smell of brick oven pizzas wafting to other tables, and knowing that at some point, that bliss will be yours. Al fresco dining is designed with a chicly rustic feel. The atmosphere is cool and relaxed, "Casa Tua" meaning "Your Home" in Italian. With a Sicilian-style thin crust, dripping with cheese and fresh-made tomato sauce, this pizza comes with a variety of toppings in the meat and veggie categories. Pasta dishes, full Italian meals like Lasagne and veal Osso Buco, fresh salads and rich desserts are also on the menu. Casa Tua's famous secret



thin crust recipe was handed down by an Italian chef, known locally as "the pizza master", in the French student city of Montpellier in 1969. This recipe has been perfected over the years to such a point where Casa Tua is known on the island these days for the best pizza. Period.

Casa Tua Palm Beach open from 5pm to 11pm. Casa Tua Downtown open from 11am to 11pm, on Sunday from 5pm to 11pm.
For more information or reservations
Palm Beach: 586 8470
Downtown: 588 5695



Beachside Dining in that 'just right' atmosphere Matthew's Beachside Restaurant

EAGLE BEACH – Located at Casa del Mar resort in Eagle Beach, Matthew's is the brain child of Stefan Legger, who owned and operated Rumba Bar & Grill for 6 years. Matthew's redefines the concept of a beachside restaurant, delivering an exquisite blend of fine dining and comfort food with that 'sand on your toes' feeling. The staff is extremely friendly and demonstrate very clearly that they are there for one thing; you.



Opening Hours
Daily from 7:30am till 10:00pm

Daily Happy Hours
Noon - 1:00pm
4:00pm - 6:00pm (with live music)
9:00pm - 10:00pm

For Reservations & Information call:
Tel: 588 7300



Also being a very wanted venue for events and weddings, it very advisable to call and make a reservation, but if you want to just give it a go, no problem. Matthew's has a great bar which will keep you abreast of all the action, whether it's sports on one of their 3 TV's, or what cocktails the bartenders can whip up for you. Besides breakfast, lunch and dinner, Matthew's offers all you can eat spareribs on Tuesdays, Champagne brunch on Sundays and of course their famous daily happy hours with live music at the bar.



PAGO PAGO
Seafood & Grill Dining

Enjoy wonderful cuisine as you dine in this unique American steakhouse with a Caribbean flair.

Two diverse culinary worlds are offered: exotic Caribbean food and cowboy-size servings of USDA-certified Black Angus Beef.

Special offer:
Pay just 1/2 price for the first bottle of wine any Tuesday from 6-7:30p.m., with a three-course dinner, two persons minimum.



baci
ristorante

Italian zest for living adds a unique flavor to your dinner at Baci Ristorante. "Bevenuti" to our Old Country piazza.

Special offer:
Enjoy a free birthday dinner (food only, three-course dinner) with a minimum of four persons – ID required.

THE WESTIN
RESORT
ARUBA



AZULL

An epicurean delight located in a romantic setting on a sugary sand beach with a golden glow of a sunset as a backdrop.



BON
cafe
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For the best breakfast buffet on the island, start your day right!

Discover the island's premier collection of dining options

For hours of operation and reservations please call tel 297.586.4466
Valid through the months of September & October 2008.

“Havana Dance,” is the hottest Cuban show on the island



ORANJESTAD - The Dance” explodes on stage with a thrilling mix of Latin & Cuban music, colorful costumes and high energy, contemporary Cuban



dance.

“Havana Dance” is the biggest stage production in the Caribbean, featuring Cuban dancers and entertainers directly from Havana. The show delivers a purely Cuban spectacle, with a cast of 12 female ballerinas, 4 male dancers, 2 singers and 3 acrobats, performing a fresh program accompanied by live Cuban music performed on stage by a genuine Cuban orchestra, consisting of 5 professional Cuban musicians. This live dance AND live music combination as seen in our pictures, is ‘first of its kind’ on the island.

While the greater part of the “Havana Dance” review enjoys predominantly Cuban flavor, the show is graced with a truly unique Caribbean choreography, and many tropical touches. “Havana Dance” unfolds on a two-tiered stage, with entrances and exits to and off the arena at different heights, which presents a



new visual concept. The custom-designed costumes are sensual, daring, colorful, and luxurious and set “Havana Dance” apart from any other cabaret.

Producer Steve Hudson who enjoyed an unprecedentedly-successful seven-year run with his previous “Let’s Go Latin” review, conceived and created an exciting and much-evolved new must-see spectacle.

Tickets for “Havana Dance” are US\$ 49.- Children under 12 pay US\$25.-

Tickets are available at the theater box office, Renaissance Aruba Resort, and can also be purchased

at the concierge’s desk at the Renaissance Aruba Resort. Other ticket vendors include the De Palm Tours and Pelican Adventure Activity Centers at the resorts. A special dinner & show package is also available in conjunction with the L.G. Smith’s Steak & Chop House for US\$89.- per person.

For additional information and reservations call the Crystal Theatre at Tel.: 583 6000, ext. 6115, between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. After 5 p.m., call tel.: 583 6000 ext. 6357. Don’t miss an opportunity to be greatly entertained by the sizzle of “Havana Dance.” □

“Aruhiba” Aruba’s homemade cigar



ORANJESTAD - Benjamin Petrochi has started the newest export product of Aruba, locally produced cigars called ‘Aruhiba’. These cigars are produced and cultivated in Aruba. Petrochi has always had an interest in the cigar business and has also sold cigars from outside, and now he is growing his own tobacco crop. After many attempts and trips to Santo Domingo and Cuba he started his own production and cultivation of



“Aruhiba” cigars in Aruba. The process took 5 years Petrochi’s dedication to the cigars is important for the molding and process of making a perfect cigar which takes a long time. The cigar case is specially designed for the cigars with the logo ‘Aruhiba’ and ‘Made in Aruba’. Petrochi considers ‘Aruhiba’ a promotion for Aruba through fine quality cigars. The company sells international cigars as well. Buy a gift box of Aruhiba

Corona with five cigars and get 1 free for \$35.00.

Located at the Historic Dutch Windmill from 8am to 8pm. Closed on Sunday.

The only place to get Aruhiba and all major credit cards accepted.

We have homemade and best premium Cuban Cigars. All cigars are legal through costum.

Call 586-7833 or 593-6177.

Open for tour operators and we have a large parking space. Come and see Mr. Petrochi rolling the cigars everyday.



A glittering New Year's Eve at The Westin Resort, Aruba



PALM BEACH – Guests attending the New Year's Eve celebrations at The Westin Resort, Aruba enjoyed a fabulous night of dinner and dancing in the Grand Palm Beach Ballroom, where a glamorous event to ring in 2009 took place. Guests began their evening with a bountiful buffet of international cuisine followed by a New Year's

Eve ballroom extravaganza featuring premium open bar, party favors, and dancing to live music. The evening was enjoyed by both guests of the resort and many local families and couples that have made this annual New Year's event at The Westin Resort, Aruba their favorite place to celebrate. □



ECO Destination Management Services thanks employees and partners



PALM BEACH – ECO Destinations Management hosted an informal brunch party in honor of its employees and partners at the Hyatt Regency. Ruben, Magali, Glenda and their entire crew enjoyed brunch in community with

individuals responsible for ECO's tremendous success handling transfers, decorations, customer service and many other aspects of professional destination management services. The year-end appreciation party featured interactive food

stations, and many delicious brunch creations, courtesy of the Hyatt Regency culinary team.

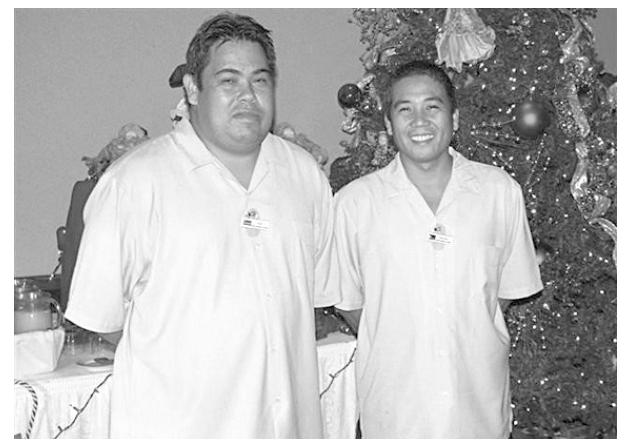
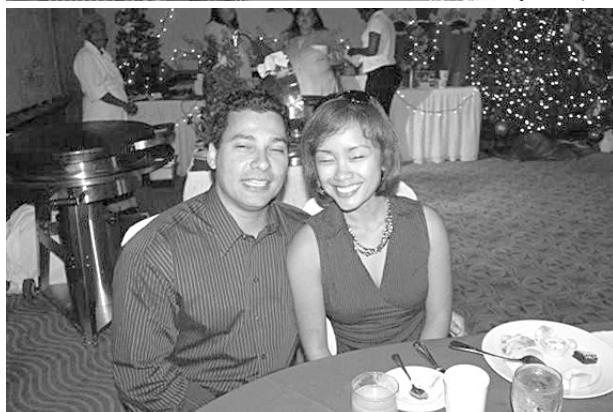
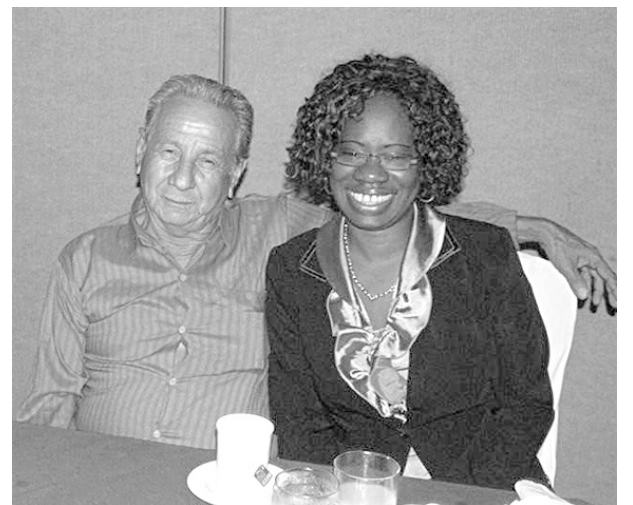
EcoDestinationManagement Services is a one-stop source for a successful group experience in Aruba. As the only full-service destination management company here, ECO DMS combines creativity, personal service and superior professional skills to deliver memorable trips designed to impress and reward business clients.

Pictured here enjoying leisurely brunch, the ECO DMS team and their guests. Incidentally, Wichita Villacres, the owner of ECO DMS, for 21 years, and PRA Destination Management Southeast Florida, for 6 years, reports that Patrick Sullivan, the owner of Ovation Global DMC has just accepted the SITE Presidency while at the SITE conference in



Montreux Switzerland. Other movers and shakers of the Society of Incentive & Travel Executives, Bill Boyd, Denise Dornfeld, Wichita Villacres, Terrie Thurston, Phillip Repasky, Iris Langanke and Joost DeMeyer were also in

attendance at the conference cheering Patrick on. Next year's SITE Annual Conference will be in Aruba and Wichita Villacres is the co-chair of the conference, Oct. 30 to Nov. 2, 2009. □



2008, out with a bang



Palm Beach – One of the biggest strings of firecrackers on Palm Beach was that of Amazonia Churrascaria and Aqua Grill stopping traffic all the way to Eagle Beach as staff and management sent the old year out with a bang, with hundreds of thousands of celebration firecrackers.

General Manager Hubert Solagnier of Amazonia Churrascaria and Shirley Barrow of Aqua Grill enjoyed the distinct honor of uncoiling the firecrackers and igniting

the fuse, sending 2008 into history.

Pictured here the staff of Amazonia Churrascaria and Aqua Grill welcome the new

year with a champagne toast, escorting the old year out with popping sounds and smoke, warding all evil off, welcoming prosperity and goodness. □

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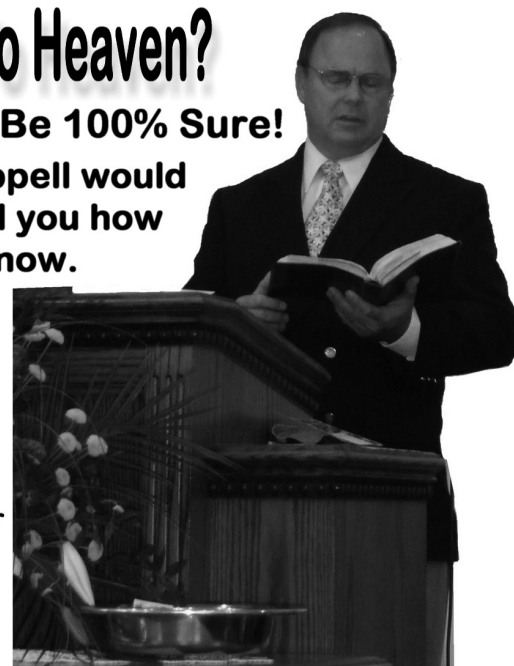


Come early for fellowship & refreshments

Every Sunday

Place: Fantastic Gardens

Time: 10:00 AM

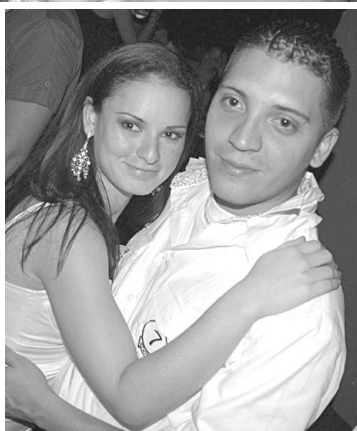
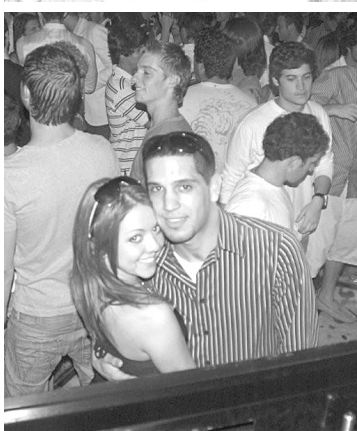
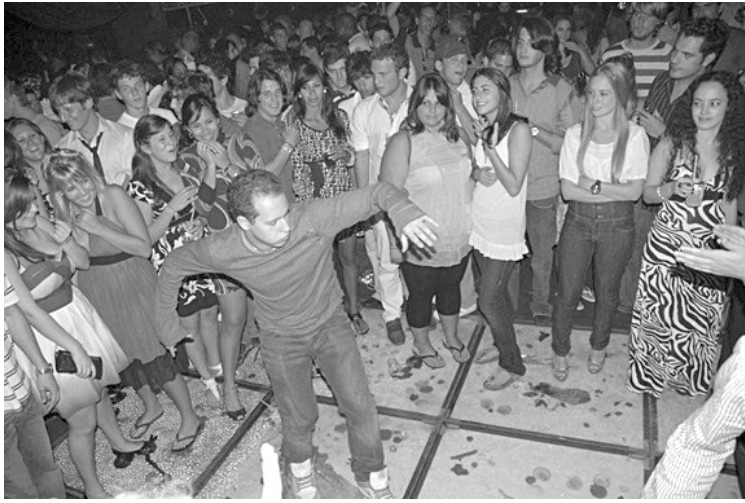


Place: Talk Of The Town

Time: 6:00 PM



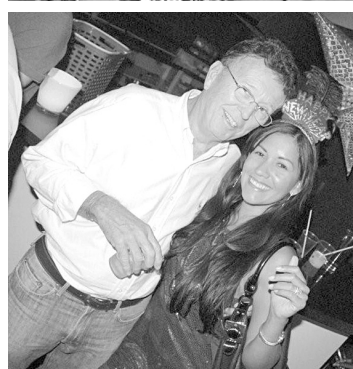
New Year's Resolutions massively broken at Confession



PALM BEACH – Every year people en masse vow to stop drinking, smoking, to lose weight, eat healthier, be nicer to the in-laws, do not forget to feed the cats, to not forget the wife's birthday, take out the trash as the Mrs. wants, wear clean underwear everyday, etc. etc. etc.

The people who went to Confession Club for I Love Muzika's New Year Bash had no such intentions whatsoever. As always with I love Muzika, the people lucky enough to get in enjoyed a lavish party atmosphere with pumping music, free flowing drinks and a very well dressed crowd. The party lasted until well in the morning of the New Year, the crowd not wanting to leave. What a way to ring in the New Year, breaking all the New Year's resolutions on the very first night. Those will no doubt have to wait until the next year save one; to always attend the parties of I Love Muzika! □

- Photos by JJ -



The Promenade

L.G. Smith Blvd. 160 (Traffic Lights by Divi Divi, Tamarijn Beach Resort).



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SOUTH BEACH MALL - Café Rembrandt hosted a quiet yet exuberant New Years Eve party, dispensing with cover charges and extravaganzas. The patrons thoroughly enjoyed themselves due to the fantastic staff, who were on the ball the whole night making sure everything was just right. The results were very apparent as the atmosphere was unique. The gathered crowd partied until the late or early hours, finally closing to finish off a fantastic way to start the New Year.

All the staff and management at Rembrandt wish you a wonderful 2009! □

- Photos by JJ -



The hottest place to be cool is Bugaloe!



PALM BEACH - There is only one Bugaloe on Aruba: it is the hottest place to be cool and the coolest place to be hot. Friends and fun are the main ingredients at the beach bar, but great food, drinks and music get a good second place. The sunsets, the breeze and the turquoise ocean are right at the top as well, of course. Bugaloe is located on De Palm Pier on the beach between the RIU Palace and the Radisson Resort at the Hi-Rise strip: an easy walk from all the major hotels.

People from all over the world get together at Bugaloe: they have a few drinks,

a bite to eat, they dance and sway and make new friends. If you have gotten curious here and now, check out the website www.bugaloe.com and you will see at one glance what we are talking about. No words will be needed anymore. Surf to the website for the Bugaloe Event Calendar or leave a note in the Guestbook.

Bugaloe's daily Happy Hours are considered the starting signal for an evening of partying on the island. Locals mingle with visitors and raise their glasses. When you get hungry, order a scrumptious burger, a gourmet pizza, tasty wings or a salad and party on. The night is young, the world is going crazy and you are right in the middle of a super happening. What's not to like? A twice-a-month live breakfast radio show on Fri-

day mornings with a spectacular breakfast buffet will keep you entertained as well.

A hot tip: Bugaloe Beach Bar puts on live bands on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Lotus (YouTube keywords: lotus, bugaloe) and Marisela & Aquarius (YouTube keywords: marisela, confidential, 2008) are playing the stars from the sky. These bands are drawing the crowds, so be there or be square! On those nights the young as well as the young-at-heart are having the time of their lives. Photos of Bugaloe's happy times can be viewed at www.bugaloe.com. Don't forget to put your own movie of you and your friends having a whale of a time at Bugaloe on the web and enjoy being famous, crazy and hilarious. So upload, upload! We are looking forward to seeing you on YouTube or live in action.





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Sandwiches, Wraps
Wings, Calamari

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Web site:

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umpteen cuts of sizzling beef, pork, lamb, sausage, and poultry. The meats are prepared in the healthiest style of cooking—slow roasting—where much of the fat drips off in the roasting process, so those looking for a lower fat option to sautéing, pan frying, or deep frying will also be able to indulge. The Brazilian-style steakhouse also offers up a gar-

den full of healthy eats on a **lavish 40-item seasonal salad bar**, giving dieters plenty to choose from to accompany the slow-roasted meats. A selection of fresh lettuces and vegetables may be standard for most salad bars, but **Texas de Brazil's** version goes a gourmet twist further, treating the palate to additional items like marinated portabella mushrooms, sweet roasted bell peppers, hearts of palm, sundried tomatoes, imported cheeses—including fresh buffalo mozzarella—sushi, homemade soups, and much more.

The salad bar is included in the continuous service meal with unlimited choices from the grilled meats, but for vegetarians or the non-meat eaters, a special price is offered for just the salad bar. Of course, for those looking

to splurge while on vacation, Texas de Brazil will gladly serve their garlic mashed potatoes, traditional fried plantains, and their world-famous parmesan cheese bread as part of the meal ☐

For more information or to make reservations, please call 586-4686



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President George W. Bush, with first lady Laura Bush, waves as they return to the White House from Texas, Thursday, Jan. 1, 2009, in Washington.

Associated Press

Bush: Hamas attacks on Israel an 'act of terror'

By BEN FELLER

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) - President George W. Bush on Friday branded the Hamas rocket attacks on Israel an "act of terror" and outlined his own condition for a cease-fire in Gaza, saying no peace deal would be acceptable

without monitoring to halt the flow of smuggled weapons to terrorist groups.

Bush chose his taped, weekly radio address to speak for the first time about one of the bloodiest Mideast clashes in decades. It began a week ago.

Continued on Next Page

Snow storm blocks Northwest roads

PORTLAND, Ore. — A mud slide destroyed a home Friday, briefly trapping its occupants, and flooding, mud and deep snow blocked roads as the latest winter storm pummeled the Northwest.

Residents of a home in suburban Lake Oswego called 911 early Friday saying they were trapped after mud flowed into their home, filling the first floor. They escaped out a window and were taken to a hospital, said deputy Fire Marshall Gert Zoutendijk. He said their lives were not in danger.

Authorities said 21 nearby homes were evacuated.

Outside Portland in Clackamas

County, about 30 families were evacuated from a mobile home park because of flooding and about 60 roads were closed. County officials declared a state of emergency.

The storm dropped just over 3 inches of rain east of Portland before the sky cleared during the morning, and 3.9 inches fell in Aurora, south of the city.

In the Cascade range in Washington, heavy snow kept one of that state's three main east-west mountain passes closed Friday.

All three Cascade passes were closed for most of New Year's Day, but crews reopened Interstate 90 across Snoqualmie

Pass late Thursday and U.S. 2 and U.S. 12 over Stevens Pass on Friday morning.

Avalanche warnings were in effect for the Cascades and Olympics in Washington.

Southeast of Portland, a highway east of Sandy remained shut down Friday by a slide that piled mud and broken trees up 2 feet deep on Thursday.

Oregon's Columbia River Highway was closed by slides between the Vista House and Multnomah Falls, and the state Department of Transportation reported numerous other closings, including one lane of Interstate 205 south of Portland. □

U.S. readying south Afghan surge against al-Qaida, Taliban



US soldiers flock around a damaged Armored Personnel Carrier, left, on the ground of a suicide bombing near the Parwan governor's compound in Parwan, north of Kabul, Afghanistan on Sunday, Dec. 29, 2008. A suicide car bomber struck a governor's compound on Monday while U.S. troops were inside, officials said. The blast killed two Afghan civilians and wounded two American soldiers.

Associated Press

By SEBASTIAN ABBOT

Associated Press Writer

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP) - Pakistan reopened the main supply route for U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan on Friday after blocking it for three days during an operation against militants blamed for repeated attacks on convoys in the Khyber Pass, an official said.

Authorities say the operation was a success, but a similar offensive in June failed to curtail attacks and was followed by a controversial peace deal with tribal elders in the northwest Khyber region that U.S. officials say allowed militants to regroup.

The U.S. plans to deploy up to 30,000 additional troops to landlocked Afghanistan next year, further increasing the importance of secure supply routes through Pakistan, which deliver up to 75 percent of the fuel, food and other goods used by Western forces.

Continued on Page B6



Travelers, including Steve Winter of Renton, Wash., center, wait in a parking lot on Snoqualmie Ridge ski resort to be escorted westbound down the eastbound lanes toward North Bend by the Washington State Patrol Friday, Jan. 1, 2009, in North Bend, Wash.. Heavy snow fall and high avalanche risk have closed three major mountain passes that won't reopen until Friday. Forecasters are predicting 5 to 6 feet of snow in the Cascades through Saturday.

Associated Press

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ACT OF TERROR

Continued from Page B1

Israeli warplanes have rained bombs on Gaza, targeting the Palestinian militant group Hamas, which has traumatized southern Israel with intensifying rocket attacks.

“The United States is leading diplomatic efforts to achieve

a meaningful cease-fire that is fully respected,” Bush said. “Another one-way cease-fire that leads to rocket attacks on Israel is not acceptable. And promises from Hamas will not suffice - there must be monitoring mechanisms in place to help ensure that smuggling of weapons to terrorist groups

in Gaza comes to an end.”

The White House released Bush’s radio address a day early. It airs on Saturday morning.

More than 400 Palestinians and four Israelis have been killed in the latest offensive. The U.N. estimated Friday that a quarter of the Palestinians killed were civilians. In their waning days in power, Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have been working the phones with world allies to try organize a truce.

Bush offered no criticism of Israel, depicting the country’s air assaults as a response to the attacks on its people. The White House will not comment on whether it views the Israeli response as proportionate or not to the scope of rocket attacks on Israel.

“This recent outburst of violence was instigated by Hamas - a Palestinian terrorist group supported by Iran and Syria that calls for Israel’s destruction,” Bush said. “Eighteen months ago, Hamas took over the Gaza Strip in a coup, and since then has imported thousands of guns and rockets and mortars. Egypt brokered a cease-fire between

Hamas and Israel, but Hamas routinely violated that cease-fire by launching rockets into Israel.”

The president said Hamas ultimately ended the cease-fire altogether on Dec. 19 and “soon unleashed a barrage of rockets and mortars that deliberately targeted innocent Israelis - an act of terror that is opposed by the legitimate leader of the Palestinian people, President (Mahmoud) Abbas.”

Hamas-run Gaza has been largely isolated from the rest of the world since the Islamic militants won parliamentary elections in 2006. Then Hamas violently seized control of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, expelling forces loyal to the moderate Abbas - the “coup” to which Bush referred.

Bush expressed deep concern about the humanitarian suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza. U.N. officials say Gaza’s 1.5 million residents face an alarming situation under constant Israeli bombardment, with hospitals overcrowded and both fuel and food supplies growing scarce.

Bush blamed Hamas.

“By spending its resources on rocket launchers instead of roads and schools, Hamas has demonstrated that it has no intention of serving the Palestinian people,” Bush said. “America has helped by providing tens of millions of dollars in humanitarian aid, and this week we contributed an additional \$85 million through the United Nations. We have consistently called on all in the region to ensure that assistance reaches those in need.”

The White House has cautiously said Israel must be mindful of the toll its military strikes will have on civilians. Here, too, Bush blamed Hamas for hiding within the civilian population. “Regrettably, Palestinian civilians have been killed in recent days,” he said.

International calls for a cease-fire have been growing. Increasingly, the conflict appears to be another one that President-elect Barack Obama will inherit when he takes office in Jan. 20. Rice on Friday briefed Bush on developments in Gaza but said she had no plans to make an emergency visit to the region. □

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Motorists' habits spur call for tax increases

By JOAN LOWY

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Motorists are driving less and buying less gasoline, which means fuel taxes aren't raising enough money to keep pace with the cost of road, bridge and transit programs.

A federal commission created by Congress to find a way to make up the growing revenue shortfall in the program that funds highway repairs and construction is talking about increasing federal gas and diesel taxes.

A roughly 50 percent increase in gasoline and diesel fuel taxes is being urged by the commission until the government devises another way for motorists to pay for using public roads.

The 15-member National Commission on Surface Transportation Infrastructure Financing is the second group in a year to call for increasing the current 18.4 cents a gallon federal tax on gasoline and the 24.4 cents a gallon tax on diesel. State fuel taxes vary from state to state.

In a report expected in late January, members of the infrastructure financing commission say they will urge Congress to raise the gas tax by 10 cents a gallon and the diesel tax by about 12 cents to 15 cents a gallon. At the same time, the commission will recommend tying the fuel tax rates to inflation.

The commission will also recommend that states raise their fuel taxes and make greater use of toll roads and fees for rush-hour driving.

Although the cost of gasoline has dropped dramatically in recent months, such tax increases could be politically treacherous for Democratic leaders in Congress. A gas tax hike was one of the reasons they lost control of the House and Senate in the 1994 elections. President-elect Barack Obama has expressed concern about raising fuel taxes in the current economic climate.

But commission members said the government must find more road and bridge building money somewhere.

"I'm not excited about a gas tax increase, but the reality is our current gas tax doesn't pay for upkeep of the system we have now," said Adrian Moore, vice president of the Reason Foundation, a libertarian think tank in Los Angeles, and a member of the highway revenue commission. "We can either let the roads go to hell or we can pay more."

The dilemma for Congress is that highway and transit programs are dependent for revenue on fuel taxes that are not sustainable. Many Americans are driving less and switching to more fuel-efficient cars and trucks, and a shift to new fuels and technologies like plug-in hybrid electric cars will further erode gasoline sales.

According to a draft of the financing commission's recommendations, the nation needs to move to a new system that taxes motorists according to how much they use roads. While details have not been worked out, such a system would mean equipping every car and truck with a device that uses global positioning satellites and transponders to record how many miles the vehicle has been driven, and perhaps the type of roads and time of day.

"Most if not all of the commissioners have a strong belief and commitment that we need a fundamental transformation of the current system," said commission chairman Robert Atkinson, president of the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, a technology policy think tank in Washington.

A study by the Transportation Research Board of the National Academies estimated that the annual gap between revenues and the investment needed to improve highway and transit systems was about \$105 billion in 2007, and will increase to \$134 billion in 2017 under current trends.

Projected shortfalls in revenue led the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission, in a report issued in January 2008, to call for an increase of

as much as 40 cents a gallon in the gas tax, phased in over five years.

Charles Whittington, chairman of the American Trucking Associations, which supports a fuel tax increase as long as the money goes to highway projects, said Congress may decide to disguise a fuel tax hike as a surcharge to combat climate change.

Transportation is responsible for about a third of all U.S. carbon emissions created by burning fossil fuels. Traffic congestion wastes an estimated 2.9 billion gallons of fuel a year. Less congestion would reduce greenhouse gases and dependence on foreign oil.

"Instead of calling it a gas tax, call it a carbon tax,"



In this Nov. 28, 2008 file photo, gas prices posted at a Shell gas station in Stockton, Calif. A 50 percent increase in gasoline and diesel fuel taxes is being urged by a federal commission to finance highway construction and repair until a government devises another way for motorists to pay for using public roads.


Associated Press

Whittington said.

Bottlenecks around the nation cost the trucking industry about 243 million lost truck

hours and about \$7.8 billion per year, according to the commission. □


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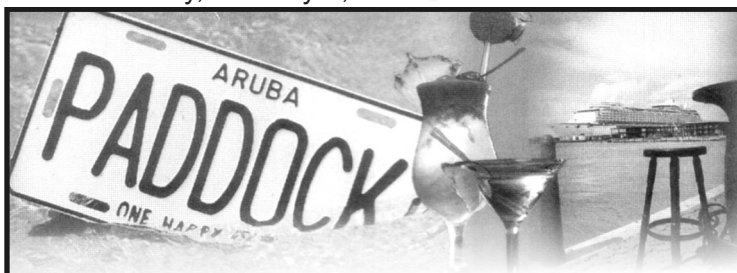


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Obama's team polishing economic stimulus measure



President-elect Barack Obama waves as he departs Honolulu for Chicago on Thursday, Jan. 1, 2009.

By **ANDREW TAYLOR**
Associated Press Writer
WASHINGTON (AP)

- President-elect Barack Obama's transition team is putting the finishing touches on an economic recovery plan that could run from \$675 billion to \$775 billion.

Briefings for top congressional Democratic officials are likely this weekend or on Monday, a senior transition official said Friday.

Obama is slated to meet Monday with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid in a Democratic strategy session likely to focus on the economic recovery package.

Democrats had hoped to get the recovery plan set for Obama's signature as close to Inauguration Day as possible, but it is plain that the schedule is slipping.

When Congress convenes next

week there will only be two weeks before the inauguration. The earliest the measure could reach the House floor is the week of Jan. 12, said a Pelosi spokesman, and even that is looking doubtful.

Republican leaders have demanded time to scrutinize the measure, a request that seems likely to be granted, at least in part. A separate Obama transition official promised "full transparency" in considering the plan.

The Senate's top Republican, Mitch McConnell, again protested Friday that his party and the public need time to scrutinize the Obama plan so that "every dollar needs to be spent wisely and not wasted in the rush to get it spent."

Congressional aides briefed on the measure say it's likely to blend tax cuts of \$500 to \$1,000 for middle-class individuals and couples with

about \$200 billion to help revenue-starved states with their Medicaid programs and other operating costs.

A large portion of the measure will go toward infrastructure projects, blending old-fashioned brick and mortar programs like road and bridge repairs and water projects with new programs such as research and development on energy efficiency and an expensive rebuilding of the information technology system for health care.

Despite the proposal's big price tag, a top lawmaker questioned whether the economic situation is so dire that Congress may not be able to pump money into the economy fast enough.

"My main worry is whether or not we can find enough places to responsibly put money so that you have a big enough effect to correct the problem or at least mitigate the problem," said House Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey.

Obey said the focus is on getting taxpayer dollars into programs that can spend it quickly such as aid to states suffering massive budget gaps. He declined to go into other specifics but said the measure won't lead to many permanent spending hikes.

"We are trying to focus on what can get out the fastest that will not be built into the budget baseline when the recession is over," Obey said.

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AirTran apologizes for removing Muslim passengers

By BRIAN WESTLEY

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — An airline apologized Friday to nine Muslims kicked off a New Year's Day flight to Florida after other passengers reported hearing a suspicious remark about airplane security.

One of the passengers on the AirTran flight said the confusion started at Reagan National Airport just outside Washington, D.C., when he talked about the safest place to sit on an airplane.

Orlando, Florida-based AirTran said in a statement that it refunded the passengers' air fare and planned to reimburse them for replacement tickets they bought on US Airways. AirTran also offered to take the passengers back to Washington free of charge.

"We apologize to all of the passengers — to the nine who had to undergo extensive interviews from the authorities and to the 95 who ultimately made the flight," the statement said. "Nobody on Flight 175 reached their destination on time on New Year's Day, and we regret it."

The airline said the incident on the flight from Reagan National Airport to Orlando was a misunderstanding, but the steps taken were necessary.

A U.S. Muslim advocacy group, meanwhile, filed a complaint Friday with the U.S. Department of Transportation. "It is incumbent on any airline to ensure that members of the traveling public are not singled out or mistreated based on

their perceived race, religion or national origin" the Council for American-Islamic Relations said.

One of the Muslim passengers, Atif Irfan, said the family probably would not fly home with AirTran because members had already booked tickets on another airline, but appreciated the apology.

"It's definitely nice to hear," he said.

Irfan said when he boarded the flight Thursday, he mentioned something to his wife and sister-in-law about having to sit in the back.

His sister-in-law replied that she believed the back of the airplane was the safest, but Irfan believed it was better to be by the wings.

"She said, 'Yes, I guess it makes sense not to be close to the engine in case something happens,'" Irfan recalled Friday. "It was a very benign conversation."

Shortly after taking their seats, members of the group were approached by federal air marshals and taken off the plane, Irfan said. They stood in the jet bridge connected to the airport and answered questions while other passengers exited and glared at them.

Irfan said he thought he and the others were profiled because of their appearance. The men had beards and the women wore headscarves, traditional Muslim attire.

"My wife and I are generally very careful about what we say when we step on the plane," he said, adding that they have

received suspicious looks in the past. "We're used to this sort of thing — but obviously not to this extent."

Irfan, 29, is a lawyer who lives in Alexandria, Virginia. He was traveling to a religious retreat in Florida with his wife, along with his brother and his family, including three children, ages 7, 4 and 2. They were joined by his brother's sister-in-law and a family friend.

Federal officials ordered the rest of the passengers from the plane and re-screened them before allowing the flight to depart about two hours behind schedule. The family and friend



A photograph showing an AirTran plan.

Getty Images

eventually made it to their destination on a US Airways flight.

Family members were upset that AirTran didn't allow them to book another flight. □

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U.S. soldiers wait for a flight at the airfield in Kandahar province south of Kabul, Afghanistan Monday, Dec. 29, 2008. In what amounts to an Afghan version of the surge in Iraq, the U.S. is preparing to pour at least 20,000 extra troops into the south, augmenting 12,500 NATO soldiers who have proved too few to cope with a Taliban insurgency that is fiercer than NATO leaders expected.

Associated Press

Chinese police detain tainted milk activist

BEIJING (AP) - Police detained the father of a child sickened by tainted milk apparently to prevent him and other parents from holding a news conference to complain that proposed compensation for their ill children is too low, a lawyer said Friday.

Dairies announced details of a 1.1 billion yuan (\$160 million) compensation plan this week as at least 17 people went on trial for the contamination that killed at least six children and sickened nearly 300,000 others. The milk contained melamine, an industrial chemical that caused kidney stones in children. Twenty-two dairies implicated in the scandal sent a mass New Year's text-message to Chinese mobile phone users apologizing for the contamination. "We deeply express our grief, sincerely apologize and earnestly hope to be pardoned," the message said.

The news conference, scheduled for Friday, was called off after organizer Zhao Lianhai was picked up Thursday, said Li Fangping, a lawyer for some of the parents. He said Zhao was being held at a Beijing hotel.

"The purpose was to prevent the parents from holding a news conference," Li said, adding that 10 parents had planned to participate.

The Communist government, which seeks to control what the public sees and hears, frequently suppresses comments about disasters.

The parents "said the compensation was unilaterally set by the companies with no participation from victims' families," Li said. "They thought the amount of compensation was quite low."

Under the plan, families whose children died would receive 200,000 yuan (\$29,000), while others would receive 30,000 yuan (\$4,380) for serious cases of kidney stones and 2,000 yuan (\$290) for less severe cases, according to state media. Another 200 million yuan (\$29 million) would go to a fund to cover bills for lingering health problems.

But a farmer whose son suffered kidney stones and liver damage told The Associated Press this week the compensation wouldn't even cover his medical expenses.

Zhao, who has a 3-year-old child who fell ill but has since recovered, organized other parents and created a Web site about the contamination, Li said.

The scandal has battered China's reputation and set back government efforts to restore confidence in the safety of its products following warnings and recalls abroad about toxic or faulty goods. □

AFGHAN

Continued from Page B1

Militants have stepped up attacks against convoys passing through Khyber in recent months and have also ransacked terminals in the nearby city of Peshawar holding supplies including Humvees intended for the Afghan army.

American officials say the attacks have not affected their ability to operate in Afghanistan but have acknowledged they are looking for ways to improve security along the route and are investigating alternative ways to deliver supplies. They have praised the Pakistani operation, which started Tuesday and used artillery and helicopter gunships to destroy suspected militant hide-outs.

The top administration official in Khyber, Tariq Hayat Khan, said Friday that the operation would continue, but not close enough to the road through the Khyber Pass to disrupt traffic. Khan displayed a large cache of weapons seized during the operation, including heavy machine guns and rocket launchers, and said 43 suspected militants had been arrested.

The U.S. has also attempted to disrupt al-Qaida and Taliban militants on the Afghan border by firing missiles from unmanned aircraft.

A suspected U.S. missile strike killed three militants and wounded two others in the South Waziristan tribal area Friday, the second in as many days in the lawless region, said two intelligence officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media.

Villager Yar Mohammed said the missile hit an abandoned school in the village of Medan.

The strikes have angered local residents and the Pakistani government, which says they are a violation of the country's sovereignty. But the U.S. has continued the practice in an attempt to stop the militants from staging cross-border attacks against Western forces in Afghanistan.

Washington usually does not confirm such strikes, and Pakistani military officials were not immediately available for comment on Friday's attack.

Militants in Pakistan's tribal areas have also tried to enforce their strict interpretation of Islam on local residents. Militants in North Waziristan warned Friday that all co-educational schools in the region must close by Jan. 5 or they "will be responsible for their actions." Clerics read out the warning at mosques during Friday prayers in the region's main town of Miran Shah.

Many Islamic fundamentalists believe their faith calls for strict segregation of the sexes, and some disapprove of any female education. Suspected militants have attacked several girls' schools in Pakistan's northwest Swat Valley in recent months.

Miran Shah's two co-educational schools are believed to be the only ones in North Waziristan.

Anayatullah Khan, whose 7-year-old daughter attends one of the coed schools, said he would transfer her to a girls' school even though she would prefer to stay.

"If we do not comply, it can be dangerous for us," he said. □

Thai police probe club fire that killed dozens

By DENIS D. GRAY

Associated Press Writer

BANGKOK, Thailand — Thailand's interior minister said Friday that a Bangkok nightclub fire that killed about 60 New Year's Eve partygoers could further damage the country's image, already battered by widespread political protests and a recent weeklong closure of the capital's two airports.

The statement came as police investigated the cause of the fire and grieving families prayed for the spirits of their loved ones. Police Maj. Gen. Jongrak Jutanont said authorities were focusing on whether the blaze was sparked by a countdown fireworks display organized by the club owners or by firecrackers brought in by guests.

A Singaporean was among the dead, while injured foreigners were from Australia, Belgium, Britain, France, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and the United States, according to officials and reporters.

Interior Minister Chavarat Charnvirakul said the blaze

could further damage the country's image, already hurt by months of anti-government protests that culminated in an occupation of Bangkok's airports. The unrest has crippled the country's essential tourism industry at a time when the economy was already sagging amid the global financial meltdown.

"It's about the lax law enforcement which we need to strengthen," he told reporters while visiting victims at Chulalongkorn Hospital. "But an accident like this can happen everywhere and in every country. But I really don't want this to happen because it came from carelessness."

The fire broke out shortly after midnight and raced through the jammed two-story club, trapping many as they tried to flee through one main door.

Nicole Trau, an Austrian woman who survived the blaze, told the Austria Press Agency that her group initially thought the fire was part of the festivities. "At the beginning, it was really small, and we thought it was part of

the show," Trau, who escaped injury, was quoted as saying. "But then it started looking extremely hot and we knew something wasn't right. Within minutes, the entire upper floor was in flames." Alex Wargacki, a British foreign exchange trader, said an "angel" dragged him out of the club after he became unconscious from smoke inhalation, the British Broadcasting Corp. reported on its Web site.

"I woke up and heard this voice saying, 'come on, come on this way.' Then I felt myself being dragged towards an exit," the BBC quoted him as saying from the hospital where he is in intensive care. "Had it not been for this voice with the hand of an angel I would not be alive today."

No charges related to the fire have yet been filed, but the owner, Thai-Chinese businessman Wisuth Setsawat, was initially charged with allowing underage customers into the Santika Club, Jongrak said. A 17-year-old high school student was found among the dead, he said. □



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Israel lets Palestinians flee; UN warns of crisis

By ARON HELLER
EREZ CROSSING, Israel (AP) - Israel allowed several hundred Palestinians with foreign passports to flee Gaza across its border on Friday, as its warplanes pressed on with a blistering seven-day offensive against Hamas.

The evacuees told of crippling shortages of water, electricity and medicine, echoing a U.N. warning of a deepening humanitarian crisis in the besieged strip. The U.N. estimates that at least a quarter of the 400 Palestinians killed by Israeli airstrikes against Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip were civilians.

Jawaher Hajji, a 14-year-old U.S. citizen who was allowed to cross into Israel, said her uncle was one of them - killed while trying to pick up some medicine for her cancer-stricken father. She said her father died of his illness several days later.

"They are supposed to destroy just the Hamas, but people in their homes are dying too," she said, at the Erez crossing between Gaza and Israel.

Meanwhile, in Washington, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice accused Gaza's Hamas rulers of holding the people of Gaza hostage and said an end to violence would only be possible once Hamas halted

its rocket fire against Israel. She said the United States continues to seek a "durable and sustainable" cease-fire.

"The Hamas has used Gaza as a launching pad for rockets against Israeli cities, and has contributed deeply to a very bad daily life for the Palestinian people in Gaza and to a humanitarian situation that we have all been trying to address," she told reporters.

"We are working toward a cease-fire that would not allow a re-establishment of the status quo."

International calls for a cease-fire have been growing, and French President Nicolas Sarkozy is expected in the region next week.

Israeli troops in bases in southern Israel are awaiting orders to invade Gaza.

Exiled Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal, speaking from Damascus, warned that any ground assault would lead Israel to "a black destiny of dead and wounded." He asserted that the group had sustained minimal losses.

He did, however, say Hamas was "ready to cooperate with any effort leading to an end to the Israeli offensive against Gaza, lifting the siege and opening all crossings."

Israel also appears to be open to the intense diplomatic

efforts by Arab and European leaders, saying it would consider stopping its punishing aerial assaults if international monitors were brought in to track compliance with any truce with Hamas.

Israel launched its campaign last Saturday in an attempt to halt weeks of intensifying Palestinian rocket fire from Gaza. The offensive has dealt a heavy blow to Hamas but has not stopped the rocket fire, which continues to strike deeper and deeper into Israel.

Three Israeli civilians and one soldier have been killed in the rocket attacks.

Over 30 rockets were fired on southern Israel Friday, lightly injuring four. Sirens warning Israelis to take cover when military radar picks up an incoming rocket have helped reduce casualties in recent days.

Israeli TV showed footage of a table set for the traditional Sabbath meal covered with shrapnel and broken glass.

After destroying Hamas' security compounds early in the operation, Israel has turned its attention to the group's leadership.

In airstrike after airstrike early Friday, Israeli warplanes hit some 20 houses believed to belong to Hamas militants and members of other armed groups, Palestinians



A convoy of buses loaded with Russians evacuated from Gaza Strip are seen after crossing Allenby Bridge into Jordan Friday, Jan. 2, 2009. Five buses carrying around 200 foreigners, mostly Russians, who were stuck in Gaza, crossed the Allenby Bridge into Jordan and headed to Amman International Airport to board two planes that were in standby to fly them to Moscow. Most of the evacuees were children and women. Israel allowed several hundred Palestinians with foreign passports to flee Gaza across its border on Friday, as its warplanes pressed on with a blistering seven-day offensive against Hamas.

said.

Israel bombed a mosque on Friday it claimed was used to store weapons. The mosque was known as a Hamas stronghold and was identified with Nizar Rayan, the Hamas militant leader killed Thursday when Israel dropped a one-ton bomb on his home. Rayan, 49, ranked among Hamas' top five decision-makers. The explosion killed a total of 20 people, including all four of Rayan's wives and 11 of his children.

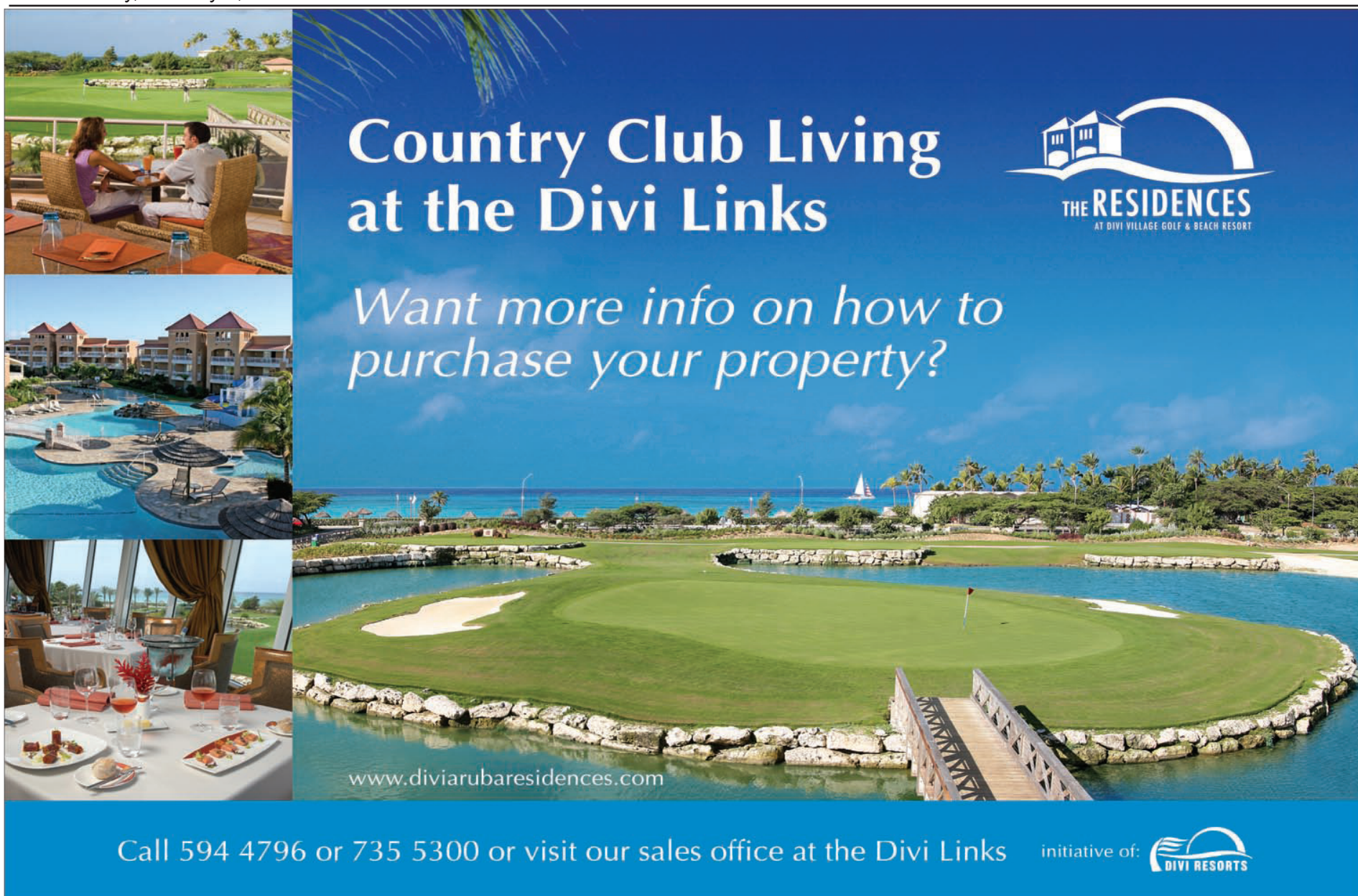
Israel's military said the hit

on Rayan's house triggered secondary explosions from the weapons stockpile there.

Fear of Israeli attacks led to sparse turnout at Friday's communal prayers at mosques throughout Gaza. But thousands of people attended a memorial service for Rayan. Throngs of people prayed over the rubble of his home and the destroyed mosque nearby.

An imam delivered his sermon over a car loudspeaker as the bodies of Rayan and other family members were covered in green Hamas flags. □

Associated Press



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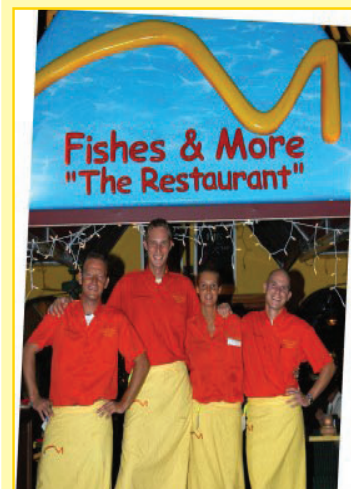
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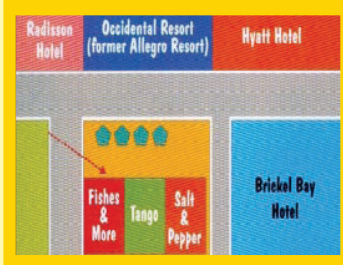


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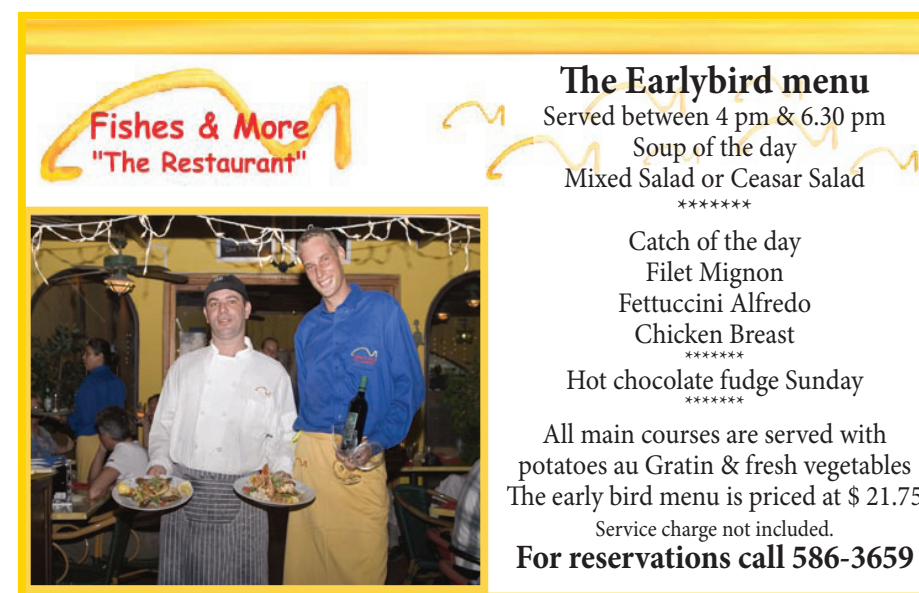



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SPORTS

Aruba TODAY

Colts QB Peyton Manning voted AP's NFL MVP



Indianapolis Colts quarterback Peyton Manning waves as he leaves the field after the Colts' 23-0 win over the Tennessee Titans in an NFL football game in Indianapolis, Sunday, Dec. 28, 2008. Manning threw for 95 yards to put him over 4,000 yards for the ninth time in his 11 seasons.

Associated Press

By BARRY WILNER
AP Football Writer

NEW YORK (AP) -
Indianapolis Colts quarterback

Peyton Manning was named NFL Most Valuable Player for the third time by The Associated Press on Friday, tying Brett Favre for the most honors. Manning was a landslide winner in balloting by a U.S.-wide panel of 50 sports writers and broadcasters who cover the NFL. Manning also was the league MVP in 2003, when he shared it with Tennessee quarterback Steve McNair, and in 2004. Favre, then with Green Bay, took MVP honors in 1995 and '96 before sharing it with Detroit running back Barry Sanders in 1997.

"I know it's an individual award, but ... truly, in my opinion, a team award," said Manning, who received 32 votes, far ahead of Miami quarterback Chad Pennington

(4) and Atlanta running back Michael Turner (4).

"It's been the most rewarding regular season that I've been a part of in my 11 years, and I have to believe a lot of the other players and even coaches might feel the same way."

This has been a most unusual season for the Colts, who normally have the AFC South division just about clinched by the end of November. Manning had two operations on his left knee in the preseason, cutting into practice time, blunting his usual precision as a passer and, eventually, leading to a 3-4 start.

From there, with Manning becoming sharper by the week, the Colts won nine straight games to secure a wild-card berth and a meeting with San Diego this Saturday.

In that nine-game streak, Manning was 209-of-290 for 2,248 yards and 17 touchdowns, with only three interceptions. He extended his NFL record with his ninth 4,000-yard season and finished with 27 touchdown passes and 12 interceptions.

Manning called the award emblematic of what others, including Colts owner Jim Irsay, president Bill Polian and coach Tony Dungy, did to help rally the team to make the playoffs for a seventh straight season.

"I really accept this award on behalf of the team and the organization because there is no way we would be in the playoffs and bounced back without those three people creating a winning environment," he said. □



Southern California quarterback Mark Sanchez (6) holds up the trophy as he celebrates with teammates Kaluka Maiava, left, and Damian Williams (18) after USC beat Penn State 38-24 in the Rose Bowl NCAA college football game in Pasadena, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 1, 2009.

Associated Press

PASADENA, California (AP) - Southern California scored on five consecutive possessions in the first half to set up a 38-24 win over Pennsylvania State in college football's Rose Bowl on Thursday. Trojans quarterback Mark Sanchez passed for 413 yards and four touchdowns and USC dominated on defense. USC scored four touchdowns and a field goal on consecutive

first-half possessions for a 31-7 halftime lead against a team that had allowed only 12.4 points per game during the regular season. Out of the mix for the national championship - Florida and Oklahoma will play the decider next week - the Trojans could only wonder what might have been had they not lost at Oregon State in September. "With all do respect, those are

College Roundup

USC beat Penn State 38-24 in Rose Bowl

two great programs, I don't think anybody can beat the Trojans," USC coach Pete Carroll said.

Orange Bowl

Virginia Tech 20, Cincinnati 7 In Miami, Virginia Tech downed Cincinnati in the Orange Bowl to join Southern California and Texas as the only schools to win 10 games in each of the past five seasons.

Darren Evans had 28 carries for 153 yards and a touchdown and Tyrod Taylor rushed for a score for the Hokies, who forced Cincinnati quarterback Tony Pike into a season-high four interceptions.

Pike threw for 239 yards and a touchdown, but had his night marred by the pick-offs and getting stopped on a fourth-and-goal in the fourth quarter. Virginia Tech became the first Atlantic Coast Conference team to win a bowl game since Florida State beat them for the 1999 national championship.

Capital One Bowl

Georgia 24, Michigan State 12

In Orlando, Florida, Matthew Stafford threw three touchdown passes in the second half to lead the Bulldogs over Michigan State.

Stafford was just 6-for-14 and an interception in the first half. After that, he looked more like the quarterback that NFL teams covet in going 14-for-17 and the three scores in a span of 18 minutes.

Stafford was picked as the game's MVP, completing his performance by showing a nice touch in threading a 21-yard TD pass late in the fourth quarter. Stafford set a single-season school record with 25 touchdown passes.

Outback Bowl

Iowa 31, South Carolina 10

In Tampa, Florida, tailback Shonn Greene rushed for 121 yards and three touchdowns, helping the Hawkeyes trounce South Carolina.

Greene, who sat out the 2007 season because of academic problems, ran for more than 100 yards in all 13 of Iowa's games and scored in all but one. He finished with school single-season records of 1,850 rushing yards and 20 TDs.

He said after this game he will pass up his senior season and enter the NFL draft.

Iowa won for the sixth time in seven games while South Carolina lost its last three while being outscored 118-30.

Gator Bowl

Nebraska 26, Clemson 21

In Jacksonville, Florida, Joe Ganz threw for two touchdowns, Alex Henery kicked four field goals and Nebraska beat Clemson.

Nebraska ended the season with a four-game winning streak and had success in a January bowl game for the first time in nine years.

It capped quite a turnaround for the Cornhuskers, who missed the postseason in 2007. □

NHL Roundup

Red Wings give Hawks cold shoulder 6-4 at Wrigley

CHICAGO (AP) - The Stanley Cup champion Detroit Red Wings came back from 3-1 down to beat the Chicago Blackhawks 6-4 in the annual outdoor NHL game on Thursday at chilly Wrigley Field.

Pavel Datsyuk skated through two defenders for the go-ahead score at 4-3 in a three-goal second period, and the Red Wings scored twice in a 17-second span of the third before 40,818 fans at the second oldest baseball park in the major leagues.

Martin Havlat had a goal and two assists to help the Blackhawks go up 3-1 after one period but the Red Wings beat Chicago for the fourth straight time this season and second time in less than 48 hours. Kris Versteeg, Ben Eager and Duncan Keith added goals for Chicago.

For Detroit, Jiri Hudler scored twice in the second period, Brian Rafalski and Brett Lebda scored 17 seconds apart, and Mikael Samuelsson also hit

the net.

Bruins 4, Penguins 2

At Boston, Manny Fernandez made 30 saves to remain perfect at home and help Boston take the overall NHL lead with its 10th straight victory, its longest since March 1973.

With the home-and-away sweep over Pittsburgh, the Bruins also moved into the top spot in the NHL with 62 points, one more than idle San Jose.

David Krejci, P.J. Axelsson, Milan Lucic and Marc Savard scored for Boston. Dustin Jeffrey scored his first NHL goal, and Ruslan Fedotenko added a goal for Pittsburgh.

Capitals 7, Lightning 4

At Washington, Alex Ovechkin had a goal and two assists in Washington's fifth straight victory and seventh in a row over Tampa Bay.

Matt Bradley, Boyd Gordon and Mike Green had a goal and an assist each, Sean Collins scored his first NHL goal, and David Steckel and

Chris Clark added goals to help Washington improve to 16-1-1 at home.

Vincent Lecavalier scored twice for Tampa Bay, and Ryan Malone and Mark Recchi added goals.

Sabres 4, Maple Leafs 1

At Toronto, Jason Pominville and Derek Roy each scored twice for Buffalo, and Ryan Miller stopped Niklas Hagman on a penalty shot and finished with 27 saves.

Roy also added an assist. John Mitchell scored for Toronto.

Canucks 2, Predators 1

At Nashville, Tennessee, Jason LaBarbera made 31 saves in his first start for Vancouver, and Mattias Ohlund and Willie Mitchell scored.

LaBarbera, acquired from the Los Angeles Kings on Tuesday, allowed only Rich Peverley's second-period goal.

In other NHL games it was, Vancouver 2, Nashville 1; Buffalo 4, Toronto 1; Washington 7, Tampa Bay 4 and Boston 4, Pittsburgh 2.



Detroit Red Wings' Dan Cleary, left, moves the puck as Chicago Blackhawks' Cameron Barker defends during the third period of the NHL Winter Classic hockey game, Thursday, Jan. 1, 2009, in Chicago. The Red Wings won 6-4.

Associated Press

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Calendar Period: December 2008 - January 2009

week#2-17-OccidentalGrand-1Bdr Supreme,OceanFront -US\$26,000	week#51 - La Cabana - Studio R#238bPoolOceanviewUS\$7,000	week# 50 - Paradise Beach- 1Bdr R#306,GardenView! -US\$6,500
week#2-17-OccidentalGrand-1Bdr Supreme,OceanFront US\$35,000	PlatinumPl. W#51 Marriott Surf. 2Bdr, Oceanview-US\$45,000	week# 50-Paradise Beach 2BTH. R#217,PoolOcean- US\$12,000
week#2-17-OccidentalGrand-1B RoyalClubGrandLe.-US\$30,000	PlatinumPl. W#52 Marriott Surf. 2Bdr,OceanFront-US\$60,000	week# 1- Paradise Beach-1Bdr R#227,OceanFront- US\$15,000
week#1-Costa Linda - 2Bdr R#2031 PoolOcean- US\$25,000	FloatingW#18-50 Marriott Ocean 1Bdr,Oceanview- US\$12,000	week#50&51,Divi Village-studio R#3214,Gardenview- US\$5,500
week#50 -La Cabana - 1 Bdr R#137c - OceanView-US\$6,000	FloatingW#18-50 Marriott Ocean 2Bdr, Oceanview -US\$ 20,000	week#52 -DiviPhoenix - studio R#110-OceanFront-US\$11,000
week#51 - DiviPhoenix - 1 Bdr. R#1401, Oceanview-US\$13,500	PlatinumW#1-17.Marriott Ocean 1Bdr, OceanView-US\$18,000	week# 1- DiviPhoenix - 2Bdr. R#206,OceanFront- US\$20,000
week#50 & 51 La Cabana-2 Bdr. R#414,PoolOcean US\$30,000	PlatinumW#1-17.Marriott Ocean 1Bdr,OceanFront-US\$30,000	week# 51-CasaDelMar aw-1Bdr. R#1329,PoolView US\$10,000
week#51-La Cabana - studio R#416b,PoolOcean-US\$7,500	PlatinumW#1-17.Marriott Ocean 2Bdr,OceanView-US\$26,000	week# 50 - RIU Palace - 1Bdr R#566,Oceanview-US\$6,000
week#50-La Cabana - 1Bdr R#227a-OceanView- US\$5,500	PlatinumW#1-17.Marriott Ocean 2Bdr,OceanFront-US\$60,000	week#1 - Riu Palace - 2Bdr R#269-OceanFront- US\$28,000
week#50-La Cabana -1Bdr R#138c-PoolOcean-US\$6,000	week# 50 - Renaissance - 1Bdr. R#2512,Gardenview-US\$9,000	week#48 - Playa Linda -1Bdr R#154-Oceanview-US\$10,000
week#52-La Cabana- 1Bdr R#118a-PoolOcean- US\$12,000	week# 47 - Renaissance - 1Bdr R#2322,OceanView- US\$5,000	week#48-DiviDutchVillage -2Bdr R#76 - PoolView - US\$12,000
Floating w#2-17 Occidental Gra. 1Bdr/dlx-PoolOcean-US\$13,000	week# 2 - Costa Linda - 2Bdr. R#2033,PoolOcean-US\$26,000	week# 1-DiviLinks-2Bdr penth. Duplex,Poolview - US\$45,000
Floating w#18-50-Occidental Gr. JuniorS-PoolOcean-US\$11,000	week# 1 & 2 Renaissance-1 Bdr. R#2508,Gardenv.-US\$9,000p.w.	week# 52 - DiviLinks - 1Bdr. R#2206,PoolOcean-US\$15,000
Floating-18-26/36-50-Occidental 1Bdr/dlx,PoolOcean-US\$10,000	week# 51 - Renaissance - 1 Bdr. R#2311,PoolOcean- US\$12,000	week# 50 & 51-DiviLinks - 1 Bdr. R#4226,Poolview-US\$16,000pw
Floating W# 1-17-Occidental Gr. studio,PoolOceanv-US\$9,000	week# 51-Aruban Resort- 1 Bdr. R#4584g, PoolView - US\$9,475	week# 52 & 1- DiviLinks - 1Bdr R#4226,PoolV.- US\$17,000pw
Floating W#18-50.Marriott Surf. 2Bdr,Oceanview- US\$23,000	week#51&52.ArubanResort-1Br R#4586, PoolView-US\$9,475pw	week# 2 & 3-DiviLinks- 1 Bdr R#4226,PoolV.- US\$15,000p.w
Floating W#18-50.Marriott Surf. 2Bdr,Gardenview- US\$20,000	week# 1 & 2,ArubanResort-1Bdr R#4585,Poolview- US\$8,475pw	week# 51&52-DiviVillage-studio R#7204,OceanV,US\$10,000p.w
Floating W#18-50.Marriott Surf. 2Bdr,OceanSide- US\$23,000	week# 2,Aruban Resort-1 Bdr. R#4584 ,PoolView-US\$8,475	week#51-ParadiseBeach-1Bdr. R#324,PoolOcean- US\$10,000
Floating W#18-50.Marriott Surf. 3Bdr,Oceanview- US\$30,000	week# 51,Aruban Resort - 1 Bdr R#3525, PoolView - US\$9,475	week# 50&51-Costa Linda-2Bdr R#3007,PoolOcean-US\$50,000
Platinum W#1-17.Marriott Surf. 3Bdr,Oceanview- US\$50,000	week#52,Aruban Resort-1Bdr. R# 4522,PoolView- US\$9,475	week#2-ParadiseBeach-2Bdr R#207,PoolOcean - US\$15,000
Platinum W#1-17.Marriott Surf. 2Bdr,OceanSide -US\$33,000	week#52,ArubanResort-1Bd. R#4524PoolView-US\$9,625	week# 3&4 ParadiseBeach-1Br R#101,P.Ocean-US\$12,000pw
Platinum W#1-17.Marriott Surf. 2Bdr,OceanView US\$30,000	week#51&52,ArubanResort-2Br. R#1552PoolView US\$13,500pw	week#49 -Renaissance-1Bdr R#2144,Gardenview US\$4,000
PlatiPl.W#51&52.Marriott Surf. 2Bdr,OceanFront-US\$140,000	week#52,ArubanResort-1Br. R#4520,PoolView - US\$9,625	week#1through52AmsterDM-2B R#213,P.Ocean - US\$520,000
PlatiPl.W#51&52.Marriott Surf. 2Bdr,OceanView-US\$125,000	week# 52, Divi Links - 1Bdr. R#2206,Poolview-US\$18,000	week#18-50.DiviVillage-1Bdr R#2E,Poolview-US\$10,000

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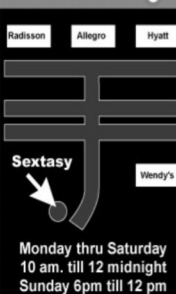
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Cuba festeja 50 años de revolución sin Fidel Castro

SANTIAGO DE CUBA (Reuters) - Cuba festejó el jueves el 50mo. aniversario de la revolución sin su principal protagonista, Fidel Castro, y bajo la consigna de que el sistema socialista que edificó pese a la hostilidad de Estados Unidos es más fuerte que nunca.

El presidente Raúl Castro, que reemplazó hace casi un año a su convalidado hermano Fidel en el poder, dijo en un discurso que la revolución fue un "justiciero cataclismo social".

"Hoy la revolución es más fuerte que nunca y jamás ha cedido un milímetro en sus principios ni en los momentos mas difíciles", dijo el general de 77 años en Santiago de Cuba, la ciudad donde Fidel Castro anunció el 1 de enero de 1959 el derrocamiento del dictador Fulgencio Batista. Pero Castro advirtió que el sistema enfrenta serios desafíos y repitió la advertencia de su hermano Fidel de que la revolución podría autodestruirse por culpa del robo y el despilfarro.

En un discurso de 35 minutos Raúl Castro evocó



Una imagen del líder cubano Fidel Castro en una muralla en Los Caminos, Cuba, 30 dic 2008. Cuba recordará el jueves el 50 aniversario de la revolución de Fidel Castro con el Comandante enfermo y la austeridad que impone la crisis financiera global a una economía martillada por los huracanes. REUTERS/Claudia Daut (CUBA)

varias veces entre vivas y aplausos a su hermano.

"Un individuo no hace la historia. Lo sabemos. Pero hay hombres imprescindibles capaces de influir en su curso de manera decisiva. Fidel es uno de ellos. Nadie lo duda, ni aún sus enemigos más acérrimos", dijo.

El aniversario de la revolución estuvo marcado por la austeridad que imponen las dificultades económicas de Cuba, acentuadas por la crisis financiera global y los casi 10.000 millones de dólares en destrozos provocados por recientes huracanes.

Fidel Castro, de 82 años, envió un mensaje de pocas líneas.

"Felicitó a nuestro pueblo heroico", escribió en una nota publicada en la portada de Granma, el periódico del gobernante Partido Comunista.

Sus partidarios dicen que la revolución trajo justicia social e igualdad de oportunidades a Cuba, un país del Tercer Mundo con indicadores sociales escandinavos y sin analfabetos.

Los críticos, en cambio, dicen que el sistema unipartidista edificado por Fidel Castro limita las

libertades individuales y los derechos humanos.

Raúl Castro ha prometido mejorar la calidad de vida de los cubanos, que, pese a los subsidios, lamentan la falta de poder adquisitivo de sus salarios, equivalentes a unos 20 dólares.

El presidente ha dicho que

los problemas económicos lo han obligado a aplazar ciertas reformas.

Su discurso para conmemorar el aniversario de la revolución estuvo lleno de advertencias para los sucesores de la vieja guardia revolucionaria que sigue gobernando Cuba. □

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